

DISCLAIMER:

This document does not meet the
current format guidelines of
the Graduate School at
The University of Texas at Austin.

It has been published for
informational use only.

The Report committee for Jason Pierce Alea

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

“Dal’she Deistvovat Budem My”: The Evolution of Viktor Tsoi’s Sociopolitical Commentary

During Perestroika

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____

Thomas Jesus Garza

Co-Supervisor _____

Michael Pesenson

“Dal’she Deistvovat Budem My”: The Evolution of Viktor Tsoi’s

Sociopolitical Commentary During Perestroika

by

Jason Pierce Alea, B.S.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

“Dal’she Deistvovat Budem My”: The Evolution of Viktor Tsoi’s

Sociopolitical Commentary During Perestroika

by

Jason Pierce Alea, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin

SUPERVISOR: Thomas Jesus Garza

CO-SUPERVISOR: Michael Pesenson

This report examines the themes presented over the course of Viktor Tsoi’s (1962-1990) career during the 1980s. During his nearly 10 year career, the themes and sociopolitical messages of his music change drastically in specific areas, while remaining consistent over the duration of his career in other thematic areas. This change in thematic focus is most marked shortly after the introduction of the Glasnost reform by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. The majority of his early work (1981-1985) was overtly politically neutral, and those songs that did have a political statement layered into them did so in a subtle way, often commenting on sociopolitical problems through the lens of social issues such as feelings of isolation and disillusionment. These works tended to focus on fairly commonplace, though widely relatable, themes such as love, social isolation, and the search for meaning in life. Although these are not the works he would come to be most remembered for, and they initially received mixed

reactions, there are critics who feel that these pieces render Tsoi's greatest and most personal messages. With the advent of Glasnost following Mikhail Gorbachev's appointment to General Secretary, Tsoi's music became much more politically charged, and music premiered at festivals and in films carried direct political themes, although it took a slightly longer time for these works to appear in published albums. The messages presented in these later works focused on the atmosphere of political and social upheaval present in the Soviet Union, the identity and strength of the young generation, and on the need for youth to call for political change in their country. This timely and identifiable message is a major reason for the massive success of the later part of his career, and part of the reason he and his work are still remembered and treated with respect more than a generation after his death.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: “Ya Bezdelnik” Viktor Tsoi- Early life and Work	4
Early Works.....	7
Chapter 2: “Poprobuy spet' vmeste so mnoy”: Glasnost and Tsoi’s later works	27
Bibliography:	46

Chapter 1: “Ya Bezdelnik”

Viktor Tsoi - Early life and Works

Integral to understanding the message of Viktor Tsoi is understanding his background and upbringing. Born into a fairly average Soviet family and situation, Tsoi was very much a picture of the typical soviet youth of his generation. The first hand familiarity with the state of the youth that his background afforded him helped drive and shape the content of Tsoi’s sociopolitical commentary. Also of note is Viktor Tsoi’s bi-racialism. His overtly Korean looks and heritage were simultaneously advantageous and detrimental.

Viktor Robertovich Tsoi was born on the 21st of June, 1962 in what was then Leningrad. He was born to an ethnic Russian mother-Valentina Vasilievna, and his father was an ethnic Korean originally from Kazakhstan. His father worked as an engineer, while his mother taught physical education.¹ From a very early age, he displayed a penchant for drawing, and eventually was enrolled in an arts school. Thus, his artistic leanings began very early in life and, continuing throughout, played a heavy role in shaping the type of person he would become.²

From an early age, he fell in with the “bitniki” tusovka. In his book *KINO s samogo nachala*, one of Tsoi’s original bandmates, Alexei Rybin, describes this tusovka

¹ *Tsoy: zhizn, pesni, filmy, legendy, ukhod* (Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskoye gorodskoye gazetnoye izdatel'stvo, 1991) 3.

² *Rozhdennyy na styke sozvezdiy* (Saint Petersburg: Pechatnyy Dvor, 1992) 5.

as being “something between the classic beatnik type and the early punks.”³ The group’s identification with this tusovka is elucidated in one of their earliest works, entitled “Kogda-to ty byl bitnikom”, which translates to “You were once a beatnik”. Furthermore, music was a defining element for members of this tusovka. Rybin recalls that “when meeting someone... we were interested basically in what kind of music they listened to.”⁴ For their part, when Viktor Tsoi and Alex Rybin initially met, Tsoi indicated that two of his favorite bands were the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.⁵

Tsoi’s entry into the musical arena began at the age of 13, when he became the guitar player for a group that called itself “Palata no. 6”. It wasn’t until some years later that he actually began to write his own songs, beginning in 1981. Shortly thereafter, he was expelled from his musical school. Officially the reason was for truancy, but it certainly didn’t help that he was an avowed member of an unsanctioned rock group.⁶ It was then that Tsoi and Rybin founded the group “Garin i Giperboloidi”, taking their name from a fictional death ray in Alexei Tolstoy’s story “The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin”. This group’s tenure was equally short lived, as it formed in the summer of 1981, and in November of that same year the group’s drummer, Oleg Valinsky, was drafted into the army.

³ Aleksey Rybin, *KINO s samogo nachala* (Smolensk, 1992) 14.

⁴ Rybin, *KINO s samogo nachala*, 15.

⁵ Rybin, *KINO s samogo nachala*, 26.

⁶ *Rozhdennyy na stuke sozvezdi*, 5.

The next year, in 1982, Tsoi and Rybin performed at the newly opened Leningrad Rock Club. While not everyone was universally impressed with them, they were able to garner positive reactions from many rockers and critics. Pavel Krusanov recalls one of Tsoi's early performances, saying: "Tsoi's 'Bezdel'nik'...was matchless-it's possible that this was his unsurpassed peak. I'm not kidding. Whoever heard 'Garin' when it was still around will say the same thing."⁷ It was also during this early period in his career that Boris Grebenschikov, the venerated leader of the band "Aquarium", took a keen interest in Viktor Tsoi. According to noted Soviet rock critic Artemy Troitsky, Grebenschikov felt that "no one's songs had so much tenderness and purity" as the young Viktor Tsoi. He quickly became "Tsoi's main fan and benefactor", Troitsky recalls.⁸ He would proceed to provide the burgeoning group everything from musical equipment, to studio space and producers. Grebenschikov's bandmates even went so far as to perform on several of KINO's first albums. It would be fair to say that without Grebenschikov's early patronage, it is possible KINO might never have been as successful as it was. With this assistance, KINO is able to release their first album of work, in which Viktor Tsoi's sociopolitical commentary first begins.

⁷ Pavel Krusanov and Nal' Podol'skiy, *Bespokoyniki goroda Pitera* (Saint Petersburg: Amfora, 2006) 34.

⁸ Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR* (English) (Winchester: Faber and Faber, 1988) 70.

Early Works

The music of Viktor Tsoi comprises several themes, varying depending upon the period of time and the social conditions during which the piece is composed. The socio-political content of his various works differs starkly based on these factors. In the early period, his work is marked by a much more veiled and covertly political content and omnipresent commentary on the daily life of a soviet youth and the worries and problems that accompany it. Many of his works from this period are political without even containing a direct political message. This is notable in pieces such as “Vremya est’, a Deneg net” and “Elektrichka”, among others. However, at the same time, there are other themes which remain consistent throughout his career, and during this early period these themes first appear and remain omnipresent. Beginning as indirectly or covertly political, his music would eventually evolve into direct political critique and calls to action later in his career.

Viktor Tsoi’s first album was released in 1982 and was entitled, simply, “45”. This title reflects the length of the album in minutes. In this album, he lays the foundation of what would become the common themes throughout his career. The album was produced largely under the auspices of Boris Grebenshikov, whose bandmates also played background instrumentals on the album. The lyrics on this album concern themselves primarily with the apolitical and covertly political themes of Tsoi’s work, geared towards the daily life of adolescents in the late Soviet Union, as well as universal

questions such as love. The album begins with “Vremya est’, a Deneg net”, which on the surface simply comments on the writer’s state of being, but at the same time manages to convey a valuable message about the social conditions of the time:

Dozhd' idyot s utra, budet, byl i est'.

I karman moy pust, na chasakh - shest'.

I ognya net, i kurit' net,

I v okne znakomom ne gorit svet.

Vremya est', a deneg net,

I v gosti nekuda poyti.

I kuda-to vse podevalis' vdrug.

Ya popal v kakoy-to ne takoy krug.

Ya khochu pit', ya khochu est',

Ya khochu prosto gde-nibud' sest'.

Vremya est', a deneg net,

I v gosti nekuda poyti.

It rains in the morning, it will, has and always is.

And my pockets are empty, on the clock – six.

And there's no light, and no cigarettes,
And in my friend's window no light burns.

I have time, but no money,
And no one to go visit.

And everyone has gotten somewhere suddenly.
I've gotten into no such circle.
I want to drink, I want to eat,
I want somewhere to simply sit.

I have time, but no money,
And no one to go visit.⁹

This piece shows evidence of several of the themes upon which Tsoi focused throughout his career. Superficially, this work discusses a soviet youth that wakes up to find that he has nothing to do, no money, and nowhere to go (having no one to visit). However, this piece also manages to convey a pertinent political critique without being overtly political in content. This piece conveys the image of a youth who, lacking the traditional state-sponsored control provided via the Komsomol, finds that the Soviet

⁹ Kino. "Vremya Est', a Deneg Net." 45. 1982.

Union lacks adequate constructive activities for youth to fill their time with. The lines “And everyone...no such circle” reflect this particularly clearly, and also reflect the nature of social life during this period as being closely tied to the tusovki. The writer, seemingly without such a group, finds himself isolated and alone.

This album also features “Moi Druzya” (My Friends), one of Tsoi’s earliest forays into songwriting. Artemy Troitsky recalls one of its initial performances favorably, saying “Viktor Tsoi from the group ‘Palata No. 6’ sang the first (and at that time only) song...composed by him, titled ‘My Friends’: 18 years old, terrible diction, Korean features, and an excellent, touching song about the aimless mood of some city teenagers.”¹⁰ The song itself, like “Vremya est’, a Deneg net”, is superficially a simple story about living as a teenager in the Soviet Union. Also like the former song, it contains insightful commentary on the state of the Soviet social system, as well as the state of mind of the young generation:

Prishyol domoy i, kak vsegda, opyat' odin.
Moy dom pustoy, no zazvonit vdrug telefon,
I budut v dver' stuchat' i s ulitsy krichat',
Chto khvatit spat'. I p'yanny golos skazhet: "Day pozhrat'."

¹⁰ Troitsky, *Back in the USSR* (English), 70.

Moi druz'ya vseгда idut po zhizni marshem,
I ostanovki tol'ko u pivnykh lar'kov.

Moy dom byl pust, teper' narodu tam polno,
V kotoryy raz moi druz'ya tam p'yut vino.
I kto-to zanyal tualet uzhe davno, razbiv okno,
A mne uzhe, priznat'sya, vsyo ravno.

...

A ya smeyus', khot' mne i ne vseгда smeshno,
I ochen' zlyus', kogda mne govoryat,
Chto zhit' vot tak, kak ya seychas, nel'zya.
No pochemu? Ved' ya zhivu.
Na eto ne otvetit' nikomu.

...

I've come home and, like always, I'm alone.
My home is empty, but suddenly the phone rings
And there will be a knock on the door and a shout from the street,
That I've slept enough. And a drunk voice will say: 'Let's eat'.

My friends always go through life marching,

Only stopping by beer stands.

My home was empty, now there it's full of people,

And this time my friends are there drinking wine.

And someone has been in the bathroom a long time,

and broken a window,

And for me already, I must confess, it's all the same.

...

And I laugh, just for myself and it's not always funny,

And I get really angry, when they tell me,

That to live like that, as I do now, is forbidden.

But why? Well I'm living.

And no one can answer that.¹¹

Interestingly, Rybin believed this to be Tsoi's best work, and the most indicative of their lives and the times in which they lived. In his memoirs, he says:

¹¹ Kino. "Moi Druzya." 45. 1982.

All our life during that time was in that song- there was wonderful music and our endless fun, and behind that-sadness and desperation, which at that time was in everything.¹²

The sentiment engendered by this song both in critics as well as musicians like Rybin demonstrates the poignancy and relevance of the piece. It portrayed the way Tsoi, Rybin, and their peers lived through clear and easily understandable language and messages. Just as the person in the piece is initially alone, and then finds themselves quickly and happily amidst their friends, Tsoi and Rybin were living in a social system that could leave them alone and unsupported at one point in time, and then quickly reverse itself. However, it's important to note that the piece connotes (and Rybin's comment confirms) that even though their lives had happy moments, it was underscored by perpetual "sadness and desperation", which is an especially pointed criticism of the sociopolitical environment of the 80's in the Soviet Union. This is also demonstrated in the situation that spurred the dissolution of "Garin i Giperboloidy". Oleg Valinsky is quickly drafted into military service, likely to be sent to Afghanistan, and unexpectedly disappears from Tsoi and Rybin's lives. The implication is that, among other problems, the young men were living in an unstable and impermanent social atmosphere, where a person could be around one day and then very possibly gone

¹² Rybin, *KINO s samogo nachala*, 62.

overnight. This undoubtedly contributed to the theme of social confusion and searching that pervaded the commentary of Viktor Tsoi's early works.

"45" also features the piece "Elektrichka". Along with "Bezdel'nik", this song is one of the most thematically representative on the album:

Ya vchera slishkom pozdno leg, segodnya rano vstal,
Ya vchera slishkom pozdno leg, ya pochte ne spal.
Mne, naverno, s utra nuzhno bylo poyti k vrachu,
A teper' elektrichka vezet menya tuda, kuda ya ne khochu.

Elektrichka vezet menya tuda, kuda ya ne khochu.

V tambure kholodno, i v to zhe vremya kak-to teplo,
V tambure nakureno, i v to zhe vremya kak-to svezho.
Pochemu ya molchu, pochemu ne krichu? Molchu.

I went to sleep late yesterday, today I woke up early,
I went to sleep late yesterday, I almost didn't sleep.
I probably needed to go to the doctor this morning,
And now the commuter train is taking me where I don't want to go.

The commuter train is taking me where I don't want to go.

In the passage it's cold, but at the same time somehow warm.

In the passage it's smokey, but at the same time somehow fresh.

Why am I silent? Why don't I shout? I keep silent.¹³

Like most of the other songs on this album, this one also follows the theme of daily life. Superficially, it tells the story of someone who's woken up late and taken the wrong commuter train. Massive numbers of people used the commuter trains on a daily basis and so the song at face value touches upon a subject with which Tsoi's listeners were sure to be familiar. However, the song can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the sociopolitical system of that timeframe in the USSR, or more broadly as a metaphor for communism in Russia generally. For either of these metaphors, the commuter train serves as a vehicle the broader audience could identify with as it takes them, the rider in the song, somewhere they don't truly want to go. The last lines of the piece are particularly evocative of this metaphor. They ask why the rider, be it the audience or Tsoi himself, doesn't shout but rather remains silent. This evokes the social system of the pre-Glasnost USSR, where despite the many problems that needed to be brought to light and discussed (the shouting out), people remained silent for the most part.

¹³ Kino. "Elektrichka" 45. 1982.

Finally, perhaps the most thematically valuable song on “45” is “Bezdelnik”.

Consider its lyrics:

Gulyayu. Ya odin gulyayu.

Chto dal'she delat', ya ne znayu.

Net doma. Nikogo net doma.

Ya lishniy, slovno kucha loma, u-u.

Ya bezdel'nik, o-o, mama, mama.

...

V tolpe ya Kak igolka v sene.

Ya snova chelovek bez tseli.

Boltayus', Tselyy den' gulyayu.

Ne znayu, ya nichego ne znayu, u-u.

I walk. I walk alone.

What else to do, I don't know.

Not home. There's no one at home.

I'm superfluous, like a heap of waste.

I'm an idler, o-o mama, mama.

In a crowd I'm like a needle in a haystack.

I'm again a person without a goal.

I chatter, I walk the whole day.

I don't know, I don't know anything.¹⁴

The sociopolitical commentary provided in this piece of music is extremely pertinent and pointed. Tsoi clearly feels apathetic towards Soviet society in this piece, like many of his peers. This sentiment perfectly portrays the disenfranchised and directionless youth. The song also continues the theme of daily activity, describing the day of the song's so called "idler". Furthermore, it reflects the pervasive "sadness and desperation" that Rybin said pervaded both his and Tsoi's lives and their early music. The song begins in this vein of sadness and isolation- its narrator walks alone and lacks anything better to do with himself. This tone continues throughout the rest of the piece- the narrator can't even simply return home as there is no one there and so it provides no escape from his isolation. The song's description of a superfluous youth who felt as valuable as a "pile of waste" would certainly have resonated with many other disenfranchised and marginalized youth in the audience, particularly in the unsanctioned rock community before Glasnost. Without the goals which previously had

¹⁴ Kino. "Bezdelnik" 45. 1982.

been given to them by youth organizations such as the Komsomol, they had to begin the process of finding their own goals and directions in life, leaving them for a time (and some permanently) as “again [people] without goals.” The piece ends with the narrator helplessly admitting that he “doesn’t know anything”, which is also a valuable social commentary. Lacking the goals that were traditionally given to them, everything else becomes uncertain as well. This social critique continues in the piece’s second part “Bezdel’nik 2”. In this song Tsoi says “Everyone tells me I need to become someone, and I would like to remain myself.”¹⁵ Tsoi here echoes a sentiment that was spreading throughout the youth: they were all being told they were supposed to be a certain type of person, yet many of them had no interest in being such a person, that is- the “good soviet citizen”, one who works and sacrifices in order to ostensibly bring about a better future somewhere down the line, regardless of their own suffering in the present.

After the release of “45”, Tsoi and Rybin had an artistic disagreement that resulted in the latter’s departure from the group (Rybin, 148).¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, KINO released another album, titled “46”. Tsoi considered it unfinished and it was released against his wishes, and as a result it contains an extremely similar track list to its successor release “Nachalnik Kamchatki”. Notably, one song that does not appear on the next work is “Pora”, which contains an atypically direct commentary for this period

¹⁵ Kino. " Bezdelnik-2" 45. 1982.

¹⁶ Rybin, *KINO s samogo nachala*, 148.

of Tsoi's work. In this particular piece, Tsoi writes : "Reading books- it's a helpful thing, but dangerous, like dynamite."¹⁷ This is indicative of the fashion in which certain knowledge and beliefs were controlled. Having the "wrong" belief system or knowledge could be dangerous. At the very least, broadening one's horizon could make it more difficult to buy into the soviet system, leading to the isolation many youth of the time period experienced.

The themes of daily life and the search for meaning that Tsoi began in "45" continue in KINO's next major release entitled "Nachal'nik Kamchatka", meaning "The Master of Kamchatka". Released in 1984, the title of the album refers to the name of the boiler-room where Tsoi worked. It was notable, because not only did Tsoi work there, but many other important figures in this period of Russian rock worked there as well. Some of these figures included Yuri Shevchuk of "DDT", Svyataslov Zadery of "Alisa", and Oleg Garkusha of "Auktsyon".¹⁸ At this point in time, Viktor Tsoi was conscious of that fact that he was writing relatable commentary on the common Soviet sociopolitical situation, and when asked in a 1984 interview what he thought the most important thing in music was, he replied "I think-topicality. And generally, the song needs to be good."¹⁹ His response indicates that he was clearly aware that the content

¹⁷ Kino. "Pora." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984.

¹⁸ Aleksey Rybin, *Eto sladkoye slovo Kamchatka* (Moscow: ANTAO, 2005) 7.

¹⁹ Rybin, Alexei, and Tsoi Marianna. *Viktor Tsoy: Literaturno-khudozhestvennyy*. (Saint Petersburg: Shok Records, 1997) 222.

of the music needed to be relatable and have relevance to the listeners to make it valuable and successful. Based on the commentary of the album released that year, and those that followed, he clearly tried to keep that answer in mind when writing.

This album expands upon the theme of looking for meaning and the social isolation that came to be emblematic of Tsoi's earlier lyrics. In "Gost", Tsoi provides more commentary on the lack of direction facing many youth:

Vecher. Ya sizhu doma.

Eto zima, eto dekabr'.

Noch' budet kholodnoy,

Esli verit' chasam, ona uzhe ryadom...

Kto budet moim gostem?

Pit' chay, kurit' papirosy,

Dumat' o tom, chto budet zavtra.

Zavidovat' tem, kto znaet, chto khochet,

Zavidovat' tem, kto chto-nibud' sdela...

...

Rasskazhite mne, chto proiskhodit.

Udivite menya, rasskazhite mne novost'.

Ubeyte menya, rassmeshite menya.

Kto pridet ko mne, poday golos!

Its evening. I sit at home. Its winter, its December.

The night will be cold , If the hour is to be believed, the time is almost
here already...

Who will be my guest?

We'll drink tea, smoke cigarettes,

And think about what will be tomorrow

We'll envy those who know what they want,

And we'll envy those who have done something...

...

Tell me, what will be.

Surprise me, tell me some news.

Entertain me and make me laugh.

Who will come to me, give voice!²⁰

In this piece, Tsoi continues his commentary on the isolation of the young generation. The lines “We’ll envy those who know what they want...have done something...” demonstrate the continued lack of direction that plagued many Soviet youth. Those who have a “good life plan” as he calls it in another work, are in a situation with which many youth such as Tsoi are unable to relate.

Also released on this album (it had also been on 46), was the song “Trolleybus”, which is one of Tsoi’s most memorable and meaningful early works. Like other early works, its lyrics contain multiple levels of meaning:

Moe mesto sleva, i ya dolzhen tam sest',
Ne poymu, pochemu mne tak kholodno zdes',
Ya ne znakom s sosedom, khot' my vmeste uzh god.
I my tonem, khotya kazhdyy znaet, gde brod.
I kazhdyy s nadezhdoy glyadit v potolok
Trolleybusa, kotoryy idet na vostok.
...
Vse lyudi - brat'ya, my - sed'maya voda,

²⁰ Kino. "Gost." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984.

I my edem, ne znayu, zachem i kuda.

Moy sosed ne mozhet, on khochet uyti,

No on ne mozhet uyti, on ne znaet puti,

I vot my gadaem, kakoy mozhet byt' prok

V trolleybuse, kotoryy idet na vostok.

...

V kabine net shofera, no trolleybus idet,

I motor zarzhavel, no my edem vpered,

My sidim ne dysha, smotrim tuda,

Gde na dolyu sekundy pokazalas' zvezda,

My molchim, no my znaem, nam v etom pomog,

Trolleybus, kotoryy idet na vostok.

...

My place is to the left, and I need to sit there,

I don't understand, why its so cold for me here, I'm not familiar with my

neighbor though we've already been together for a year. And we're

stuck, though everyone knows where the ford is. And everyone stares at
the ceiling with hope.

On the trolleybus that goes east...

All people are brothers- we're all distant cousins, and we go, I don't know where or what for. My neighbor can't do it, he wants to get off, but he can't get off, he doesn't know the way, and here we guess at what kind of thing might be helpful.

In the trolleybus, that goes east.

In the cabin there's no driver, but the trolleybus goes, and the motor has rusted, but we go straight ahead, we sit with bated breath and look there, where for a split second it seemed there was a star, and we're silent, but we know now what will help us.

The trolleybus that goes east.²¹

This work is at once a song about the common commuter vehicle, and simultaneously the trolleybus is a metaphor for the search for meaning in life. The trolleybus is full of people (headed to the east) who are equally lost in life, and are equally united as brothers both in the human race and the communal search for meaning. This sentiment is most startlingly expressed in the lines: "All people are brothers, distant cousins, and I don't know where we're going or what for... And here we guess at what kind of thing might be helpful". The last line carries the connotation that they (the riders) are looking for something to live for. Like the rest of the music, the

²¹ Kino. "Trolleybus." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984.

search for meaning is paramount and incontrovertible in this song. Tsoi says he doesn't know where they're going or what for, but they're all looking for something to give their lives meaning, and thus, they are all related through this search. This idea of commonality surely would have appealed greatly to those youth who heard this song at the time.

In 1985, KINO released the album "Eto Ne Lyubov". Despite the fact that this album was released in 1985, its works fall much more in line with the themes of Tsoi's early career. This is likely because many of the works were written divorced from the growing atmosphere of political strife engendered by Glasnost. This album, unsurprisingly, focused heavily on the idea of love. Songs like "Eto ne Lyubov", "Eto-Lyubov", "Ryadom So Mnoi", and others focused on love which was as applicable to one youth as it was to another, and is even undeterred by generation gaps. Even youth today could identify with these songs.

It also contained the very successful piece "Ya ob'yavlyayu svoy dom...", which was influenced by the ongoing Afghan war. Tsoi wrote and performed this song for the second Leningrad rock festival, the theme of which that year was the "struggle for peace."²² The song itself won several awards and Tsoi was awarded a prize for best

²² Rybin, Alexei, and Tsoi Marianna. *Viktor Tsoy: Literaturno-khudozhestvennyy*, 39.

songwriting.²³ This song is also thematically important, as it marks Tsoi's first major anti-war song, a theme that he would often revisit in the later part of his career.

²³ *Roksi* no. 7 (June 1984). Samizdat. Available from:
<http://handbook.reldata.com/handbook.nsf/Main?OpenFrameSet&Frame=Body&Src=1/A500ED1BB8F6FA7BC3256B1300547372%3FOpenDocument>

Chapter 2: “Poprobuy spet' vmeste so mnoy”: Glasnost and Tsoi’s later works

Everything changed with Glasnost in 1985. In an effort to revive the ailing soviet union and preserve the communist system through reform, Mikhail Gorbachev instituted a series of reforms that would come to be known as “Perestroika” and “Glasnost”. “Perestroika” was intended to help revive the ailing Soviet economy through several means, including allowing various state organs greater independence and the introduction of some elements of market economy into the USSR.

Glasnost was intended to make the Soviet Union’s central government more transparent and to allow Soviet citizens greater personal say in the USSR’s government. Part of this reform entailed greater freedom of the press and more freedom of speech. While it was intended to help preserve communism through reform, ironically it ended up contributing to the downfall of the Soviet Union, in similar fashion to Perestroika. While it did accomplish its stated goals to some degree, more important were the unintended consequences of Glasnost. In loosening the controls over the media and freedom of speech, there was an unprecedented outpouring of popular culture, including all manner of western influences such as music, movies, and literature.²⁴ Another unintended consequence was that the more permissive establishment allowed

²⁴ Shane, Scott. *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union*. (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1994), 182-211.

citizens access to previously obfuscated information about the true nature of Soviet history, such as the crimes perpetrated by Stalin. Those who had been unaware of this information were now faced with the terrible truth of Soviet history, and those who were already aware or at least suspected found their beliefs confirmed and reinforced. The result was that people's faith in the Soviet system was categorically weakened substantially.²⁵ The implication of this for the rock community, Troitsky notes, is that the authorities could no longer condemn them for making social criticisms and critiques in their songs.²⁶ This new social paradigm was tested and validated in the 1986 documentary entitled "Legko Ly Byt Molodym?", which was set during a massive rock concert condoned by the central Soviet government, and which frankly discussed a variety of social ills plaguing the youngest generation of the Soviet Union.

With the advent of Glasnost and Perestroika, Kino was able to come out from underground. The group's popularity quickly skyrocketed and with it, Tsoi's message became much more political and empowering. With the release of "Noch" in 1986, Kino began to rise in popularity as its music was beginning to become more accessible. It is also this year that the band begins to play its more politically charged songs and those directly empowering the youth. At the 4th Leningrad Rock Club festival the group first

²⁵ Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union*, 212-244.

²⁶ Troitsky, *Back in the USSR* (English), 116.

performed “Peremen!” and “Dal'she Deystovat' budem my”.²⁷ However, the album “Noch” itself is still largely apolitical, continuing to focus on the daily life of a Soviet youth. It would not be until several years later that political commentary truly dominated an album’s content. With songs like “Videli Noch” and “My Hotim Tansyvat” the discussion of daily life continues in this album. The thematic topic of love that served as the central focus of the previous album also makes a return to center stage with songs like “Filmy” and “Tvoy Nomer”. This album also features the premiere of “Mama Anarchia” a song about freedom in which hooligans paint a soldier’s face red and white (most likely either the Russian Flag, or the American Flag). Like many of his earlier works such as “Vremya Est' a Deneg net”, “Videli Noch” superficially touches on the themes of daily life in the Soviet Union, but manages to be a subtly political commentary as well:

My vyshli iz doma, Kogda vo vsekh oknakh
Pogasli ogni, Odin za odnim.
My videli, kak uezhaet Posledniy tramvay.
Ezdyat taksi, No nam nechem platit',
I nam nezachem ekhat', My gulyaem odni,
Na nashem kassetnike Konchilas' plenka,

²⁷ Priobrazhenskiy, Konstantin. *Istoriya Gruppy Kino*. Available from: <http://www.kinoman.net/story/story.php>

Smotay ...

Videli noch', Gulyali vsyu noch' do utra.

Videli noch', Gulyali vsyu noch' do utra.

...

We leave the house, when in all the windows

The fires have gone out one by one.

We see that the last tram has left.

A taxi goes, but we can't pay for it,

And we have nowhere we need to go, we walk alone,

On our tape players the tape has ended

Rewind...

We saw the night, we walked all night until morning.

We saw the night, we walked all night until morning.²⁸

This piece contains valuable sociopolitical commentary that connects it both with the themes of Tsoi's earlier work as well as his later, more direct political commentary. The subject of the song, having nothing constructive to do and nowhere

²⁸ Kino. "Videli Noch." *Noch*. 1986.

important to be, wanders all night aimlessly. This is also a subtle political commentary that the government surely would not have approved of as well, the political commentary being that the government was failing to adequately provide for the youth both in terms of constructive activities, places to go, and life goals, but also in terms of money to pay for simple things like a cab ride.

1987 was also a landmark year. While no album was released that year, Tsoi appears in “ASSA”. It is in this movie that the Soviet public was broadly exposed to “Peremen!” and Tsoi began truly to cement himself as a cultural icon. It also marks the point after which Tsoi’s sociopolitical commentary truly takes center stage in his music.

In 1988, “Gruppa Krovi” was released. This album is markedly distinct from its predecessors and Tsoi has become much more politically charged, his overt sociopolitical messages taking center stage on the album. His lyrics are incredibly empowering to the youth, often placing the future of the Soviet Union squarely in their hands, and calling both for change and for individual action from the youth. It is this message of empowerment and youth-centric agency for change that makes Tsoi a cultural legend and a paragon to the youth. This album featured the widespread release of the songs “Gruppa Krovi”, “Dal'she Deystovat' budem my”, “Poprobuy spet' vmeste so mnoy”, “Voyna”, “Mama, my vse soshli s uma”, and others. Nearly every song on the album has a message of either political nature, or one that empowers the youth and

places the responsibility and *ability* to enact social change in their hands. Many songs have both messages simultaneously. “Gruppa Krovi” presents the epitome of Tsoi’s anti-war music, laying out very clearly where he draws the line of acceptability:

Teploe mesto, no ulitsy zhdut

Otpechatkov nashikh nog.

Zvezdnaya pyl' - na sapogakh.

Myagkoe kreslo, kletchatyy pled,

Ne nazhatyy vovremya kurok.

Solnechnyy den' - v oslepitel'nykh snakh.

Gruppa krovi - na rukave,

Moy poryadkovyy nomer - na rukave,

Pozhelay mne udachi v boyu, pozhelay mne:

Ne ostat'sya v etoy trave,

Ne ostat'sya v etoy trave.

Pozhelay mne udachi, pozhelay mne udachi!

I est' chem platit', no ya ne khochu

Pobedy lyuboy tsenoy.

Ya nikomu ne khochu stavit' nogu na grud'.

Ya khotel by ostat'sya s toboy,
Prosto ostat'sya s toboy,
No vysokaya v nebe zvezda zovet menya v put'.

Gruppa krovi - na rukave,
Moy poryadkovyy nomer - na rukave,
Pozhelay mne udachi v boyu, pozhelay mne:
Ne ostat'sya v etoy trave,
Ne ostat'sya v etoy trave.
Pozhelay mne udachi, pozhelay mne udachi!

It's a warm place, but the streets wait for our footprints.
Stardust on boots.
A soft armchair, a plaid blanket,
The trigger not pulled in time.
A sunny day- in sparkling dreams.

My blood type is on my sleeve, my ordinal number is on my sleeve.
Wish me luck in the fight, wish for me:
Not to remain in this field, not to remain in this field.
Wish me luck, wish me luck!

And I can pay, but I don't want victory at any price.

I never want to place my foot on a chest.

I'd like to stay with you, just to stay with you.

But high in the sky, a star calls me on my way.

My blood type is on my sleeve, my ordinal number is on my sleeve.

Wish me luck in the fight, wish for me:

Not to remain in this field, not to remain in this field.

Wish me luck, wish me luck!²⁹

Tsoi makes it very clear where he considers the "line" - "putting his foot on someone's chest", that is killing someone. Like many of his works, the commentary in this piece can be interpreted in more than one way. It contains a clear message about the base nature of war, one that he would echo in other songs such as "Voyna" and "Zvezda po imeni solntse".

"Dal'she Deystovat' budem my" contains a very straightforward, strong message as well. The name of the song is a sociopolitical message in and of itself, and the rest of the song follows suit:

²⁹ Kino. "Gruppa Krovi." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988.

My khotim videt' dal'she, chem okna doma naprotiv,

My khotim zhit', my zhivuchi, kak koshki.

I vot my prishli zayavit' o svoikh pravakh: "Da!"

Slyshish' shelest plashchey - eto my...

Dal'she deystvovat' budem my!

My rodilis' v tesnykh kvartirakh novykh rayonov,

My poteryali nevinnost' v boyakh za lyubov'.

Nam uzhe stali tesny odezhdy, Sshitye vami dlya nas odezhdy,

I vot my prishli skazat' vam o tom, chto dal'she...

Dal'she deystvovat' budem my!

We want to see further, than the window of the home across from ours,

We want to live, we live like cats.

And here we've come to claim our rights: "Yes!"

You hear the rustle of coats- Its us...

We'll take action from now on!

We were born in crowded apartments in new districts,

We lost our innocence in fights for love.

We've already become too big for our clothes,

The clothes you sewed for us.

And so here we've come to tell you, that

From now on...

We'll take action from now on!³⁰

Another important detail related to the shift in Tsoi's sociopolitical commentary is his shift to the use of "my" and "nash" as the main pronouns and subject of the music. Whereas in his early works most of the commentary was based around a singular actor and used "ya", the music has shifted to a communal focus. This further reinforces the fact that after glasnost Tsoi's commentary becomes more focused around exhorting the youth to action. This is an important part of the commentary in "Peremen" as well. This shift is further reinforced on this album in the song "V Nashikh Glazakh" as well as "Poprobuy spet' vmeste so mnoy":

³⁰ Kino. "Dal'she Deystovat' Budem My." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988.

Na ulitse sneg utratil svoyu beliznu, V steklyannosti taloy vody my vidim
lunu.

My idem, my sil'ny i bodry...

Zamerzshie pal'tsy lomayut spichki, Ot kotorykh zazhgutsya kostry.

Poprobuy spet' vmeste so mnoy, Vstavay ryadom so mnoy...

Eto nash den', my uznali ego po raspolozheniyu zvezd, Znaki ognya i vody,
vzglyady bogov. I vot my delaem shag na nedostroennyy most,

My poverili zvezdam, I kazhdyy krichit: "Ya gotov!"

...

Te, kto slab, zhivut iz zapoya v zapoy, Krichat: "Nam ne dali pet'!",

Krichat: "Poprobuy tut spoy!"

My idem, my sil'ny i bodry...

Zamerzshie pal'tsy lomayut spichki, Ot kotorykh zazhgutsya kostry.

...

The snow on the street has lost its whiteness, we see the moon in water
as if it was glass. We go, we are strong and vigorous. We break matches
with our frozen fingers, from which we'll light fires.

Try to sing together with me, rise up along with me.

This is our day, we learned it from the arrangement of the stars, signs of
fire and water, and the gaze of the gods. And we're taking a step onto an
unfinished bridge, we believed in the stars, and we each shout: "I'm
ready!"

...

They, who are weak, live from binge to binge, and they shout:

"We can't sing here!" They shout: "Try to sing here!"

We go, we are strong and vigorous...

We break matches with our frozen fingers,

From which we'll light fires.

...³¹

³¹ Kino. "Poprobuy Spet' Vmeste so Mnoy." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988.

The most relevant part of the commentary in this piece is the idea that it is now “our day”, carrying on the theme of “nash” and the theme of youth empowerment and responsibility that marks this album.

“Voyna” and “Mama, my vse soshli s uma” both carry similar messages which empower the youth to believe in themselves and their ability and readiness to affect change, as well as continuing the social commentary condemning the horror of war, particularly the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which had enjoyed very little popular support since its inception and which Tsoy certainly condemned. “V Nashikh Glazakh” is yet another song on the album, the message of which places the agency to create social change in the hands of the youth, or as it were “In our eyes”. Tsoy tells how in their eyes is “the birth of a new day”, and a “lost paradise”, among other things. He also asks very frankly “What do you need? Decide!”³² In this single short phrase he asks the listener (ostensibly a youth member) what they need, and then tells them they must decide the answer for themselves. This implies that they must also choose whether they are ready and willing to enact change or if they can “accept the world as it is”.

Tsoy’s music carries on in this fashion for the following two albums, “Zvezda Po Imeni Solntse” and “Posledniy Geroy”. Included on “Zvezda Po Imeni Solntse” is the song “Pesnya Bez Slov”. This is possibly one of Tsoy’s most empowering songs, if not

³² Kino. “V Nashikh Glazakh.” *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988.

necessarily one of his most popular. The last verse of the song is a direct call to the youth to decide what they want, who they will be, and to stand up for it:

Khochesh' li ty izmenit' etot mir?

Smozhesh' li ty prinyat' kak est'?

Vstat' i vyyti iz ryada von.

Sest' na elektricheskiy stul ili tron?

Do you want to change the world?

Can you accept it as it is?

Rise up and step out of the common crowd,

Will you sit on an electric chair or a throne?³³

Those lines could even rival the exhortation to action in “Peremen”. Regardless, the question posed in this verse was one the youth who made up most of Tsoi’s audience clearly cared about. Furthermore, it was a message of empowerment to the youth from one of their own, making it even more valuable.

And finally, included on “Posledniy Geroy” (but already very famous), was “Peremen” itself, the rally cry for youth change across the Soviet Union. This song, along with “Gruppa Krovi”, would be the works that Tsoi would most come to be identified

³³ Kino. "Pesnya Bez Slova." *Zvezda Po Imeni Soltse*. 1989.

with and remembered for. The song itself combines the earlier themes of Tsoi's work with the politically charged messages of his later career:

Vmesto tepla - zelen' stekla, Vmesto ognya - dym,
Iz setki kalendarya vykhvachen den'.
Krasnoe solntse sgoraet dotla, Den' dogoraet s nim,
Na pylayushchiy gorod padaet ten'.

"Peremen!" trebuyut nashi serdtsa.
"Peremen!" trebuyut nashi glaza.
V nashem smekhe i v nashikh slezakh,
I v pul'satsii ven: "Peremen! My zhdem peremen!"

Elektricheskiy svet prodolzhaet nash den',
I korobka ot spichek pusta, No na kukhne sinim tsvetkom gorit gaz.
Sigarety v rukakh, chay na stole - eta skhema prosta,
I bol'she net nichego, vse nakhoditsya v nas.

...

My ne mozhem pokhvastat'sya mudrost'yu glaz
I umelymi zhestami ruk,

Nam ne nuzhno vse eto, chtoby drug druga ponyat'.

Sigarety v rukakh, chay na stole - tak zamykaetsya krug,

I vdruk nam stanovitsya strashno chto-to menyat'.

...

Instead of warmth- green glass,

Instead of fire-smoke,

Another day is snatched from the calendar grid.

The red sun burns itself out,

The day burns out with it,

Shadow falls on the smoldering city.

...

Electric light prolongs our day,

And the matchbox is empty.

But in the kitchen gas burns with a blue light.

Cigarettes in hands, tea on the table- it's a simple system,

And nothing more, it's all inside us.

...

We cannot brag about the wisdom of our eyes

And the skilled gestures of our hands,
But we don't need all of this, in order to understand each other.
Cigarettes in hands, tea on the table- that's how the circle is closed,
and all of a sudden we're afraid to change something.
... Peremen!³⁴

Again, the music places the impetus for change on the youth. The youth is waiting for change, and "its all within [them]". This song also uses "nash" to include the audience in its message and call.

Ultimately, the main theme of Tsoi's later career was empowerment of the youth- telling them that not only was it up to them to call for change, but also that they were ready for and capable of effecting change. This is the commentary and message for which Viktor Tsoi is remembered, even more than 20 years after his death. A common theme between both his early and later career was a shared search for meaning in a tumultuous, confusing time. The youth could relate to this search for belonging during this period, and many still do now. The varied types of tusovki that existed in the 1980's serve as a testament to their desire to create a sense of social belonging and direction. His message was also one of anti-war feeling, which was a serious and widespread social issue following the disastrous war in Afghanistan. While

³⁴ Kino. "Peremen." *Posledniy Geroi*. 1989.

his message changed from the early years, it never lost its appeal and timeliness, and he was keenly aware that the music had to be relevant to be successful.

As seen in the late 1980's this message of empowerment appealed to the youth on a massive level. Like Vysotsky before him (but perhaps with a more narrow audience than Vysotsky), Tsoi had something that appealed to almost everyone who listened to his music, and they reacted, and loved him for it. The slogan 'Tsoi Zhiv!' remains an identifiable moniker spray painted on his memorial wall on the Arbat, and elsewhere. To this day, Russian musicians routinely pay credit to him for his enormous impact on the development of both Russian Rock and the youth revolution that accompanied the downfall of the USSR. Even Sergei Shnurov of Gruppировка Leningrad, who routinely lambasted pioneering Russian rock groups such as Mashina Vremeni and Akvarium in his music, pays respect to Viktor Tsoi and his band. He even has his own song entitled "Gruppa Krovi", in which he tells the listener that it's ("Gruppa Krovi") "my favorite song, and when I'm down, I sing it."³⁵ In 2007, the winner of that year's Fabrika Zvezd, Anastasiya Prihodko, performed *Gruppa Krovi* as one of her acts. In 2010, a major concert series was held in Moscow and St. Petersburg, entitled "20 years without KINO". A wide assortment of the most prominent and talented modern Russian rock musicians performed various covers of KINO songs to huge crowds in memory of the 20 year anniversary of Tsoi's death. Tsoi's music was as much about the person listening as it

³⁵ Leningrad. "Gruppa Krovi." *Dachniki*. 2000.

was about Tsoi himself. Whatever the message of a given piece was, it was a message the youth could understand and identify with as they also “travelled on their trolleybus” searching for meaning in life.

Bibliography

Aleksander, Dolgov. *Tsoy: Cherniy Kvadrat*. St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2008. Print.

Alekseev, Aleksandr. *Kto Est Kto V Rossiskoi Rok-Musike*. Moscow: Astrel, 2009. Print.

Cushman, Thomas. *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*.

Albany: State University of New York, 1995. Print.

Domanski, Yuri. *"Tekst Smerti" Russkogo Roka*. Tver: Tverskoi Gosudarstveniy

Universitet, 2000. Print.

Eizenshpis, Yuri. *Viktor Tsoi I Drugie: Kak Zazhigayut Zvezdi*. Moscow: Eksmo, 2011.

Print.

Grebenshikov, Boris, and Aleksandr Startsev, eds. *Roksi 7 (1984)*. Web.

<<http://handbook.reldata.com/handbook.nsf/Main?OpenFrameSet&Frame=Body&Src=1/A500ED1BB8F6FA7BC3256B1300547372%3FOpenDocument>>.

Kino. "Bezdelnik." 45. 1982. CD.

Kino. "Bezdelnik-2." 45. 1982. CD.

Kino. "Dal'she Deystovat' Budem My." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988. CD.

Kino. "Elektrichka." 45. 1982. CD.

Kino. "Gost." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984. CD.

Kino. "Gruppa Krovi." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988. CD.

Kino. "Moi Druzya." 45. 1982. CD.

Kino. "Peremen." *Posledniy Geroi*. 1989. CD.

- Kino. "Pesnya Bez Slov." *Zvezda Po Imeni Soltse*. 1989. CD.
- Kino. "Poprobuy Spet' Vmeste so Mnoy." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988. CD.
- Kino. "Pora." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984. CD.
- Kino. "Pora." *Nachal'nik Kamchatki*. 1984. Vinyl recording.
- Kino. "Trolleybus." *Nachalnik Kamchatki*. 1984.
- Kino. "V Nashikh Glazakh." *Gruppa Krovi*. 1988. CD.
- Kino. "Videli Noch." *Noch*. 1986. CD.
- Kino. "Vremya Est', a Deneg Net." 45. 1982. CD.
- Krusanov, Pavel, and Nal Podolski. *Bespokoyniki Goroda Pitera*. St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2008. Print.
- Legko Li Byt Molodym? (Vai Viegli but Jaunam?)*. Dir. Yuris Podnieks. Leningrad. "Gruppa Krovi." *Dachniki*. 2000. CD.
- Parker, David Michael Akiyoshi. *The Last Hero: Viktor Tsoi, Perestroika, and the Creation of a Cultural Icon*. Thesis. Middlebury College, 2010. Print.
- Pudova, Elena. *Ostorozhno Gololed!: Maik I Tsoi v Sverdlovske 1983*. St. Petersburg: Gelikon Plus, 2009. Print.
- Riordan, James. *Soviet Youth Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.
- Rozhdennyy Na Stuke Sozvezdi*. St. Petersburg: Pechatni Dvor, 1992. Print.
- Ryback, Timothy W. *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. Print.

- Rybin, Alexei, and Marianna Tsoi. *Viktor Tsoy: Literaturno-khudozhestvennyy*. Saint Petersburg: Shok Records, 1997. Print.
- Rybin, Alexei. *Eto Sladkoe Slova Kamchatka*. Moscow: Antao, 2005. Print.
- Rybin, Alexei. *Kino S Samogo Nachala*. Smolensk: Smolenskoe Izdatelstvo 'Smyadyn', 1992. Print.
- Shane, Scott. *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1994. Print.
- Stites, Richard. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.
- Troitsky, Artemi K. *Back in the USSR*. St.Petersburg: Amfora, 2007. Print.
- Troitsky, Artemy. *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988. Print.
- Tsoi, Marianna, and Aleksandr Zhitinski. *Viktor Tsoi: Stikhi, Dokumenti, vospominanie*. St. Petersburg: Novy Gelikon, 1991. Print.
- Tsoi: Zhizhn, Pesni, Filmi, Legendi, Ukhod*. Petrazavodsk: Petrazavodskoe Gorodnoe Izdatelstvo, 1991. Print.
- Viktor Tsoi: Zvezda Po Imeni Solntse*. Moscow: Eksmo, 2007. Print.